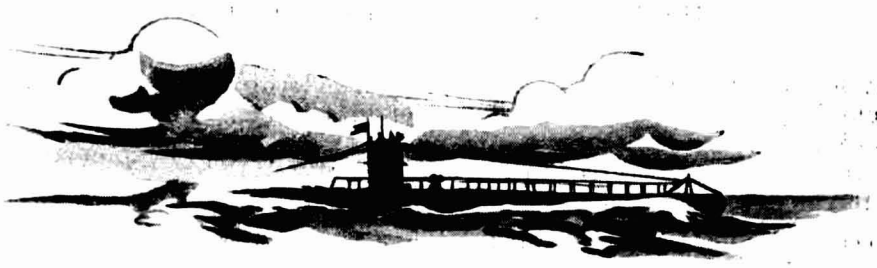

SUBMARINES IN MODERN WAR

By REAR ADMIRAL LÜTZOW

There is one phase in this war on which the leaders of the Allied camp have not displayed optimism in recent months. On the contrary, they have consistently stressed the hitherto unsurmounted difficulties facing them in this phase. We refer to the unsuccessful battle of the Allies against German submarines.

In the following article, specially written for "The XXth Century," Admiral Lützow, the outstanding German naval commentator, presents his ideas on the subject. —K.M.

THE aim of naval warfare has always been to gain supremacy over maritime connections. To keep these open for oneself and to close them for the enemy—that was the object of the struggle. In former centuries the decisions in such naval wars were always brought about in naval battles fought by fleets of warships. The victor of these battles could send out his own merchant ships and drive those of the enemy off the seas. Consequently, the proportionate strength of the various navies at the beginning of a war had an important bearing on such decisions. And since, in contrast to the land, the open seas know no obstacles of terrain, a comparison of the numbers of warships ready for action was a good standard on which to base an estimate of the ratio of strength.

These well-founded views on naval warfare were suddenly blown sky-high by the sinking of the three British armored cruisers *Hogue, Cressy*, and *Aboukir* by a German submarine, commanded by Otto Weddigen, on September 12, 1914. For this proved with one stroke that the submarine was able to pierce the naval supremacy of even the strongest battle fleet. Without regard for the enemy's numerical superiority, the submarine could injure his maritime communications and their protection, indeed, even destroy them, without, on the other hand, being able to ensure its own side's maritime connections.

The fact that, as a result of these experiences, the German U-boat attacks were directed from 1915 onwards, not so much against the warships of the enemy, as against his merchant fleets was brought about by the hunger blockade imposed upon Germany by Great Britain. In order to carry out this blockade, the British Admiralty kept back its Navy and carefully avoided any battle and, as far as possible, any contact with U-boats. We replied to the hunger blockade with a counterblockade by U-boats. From 1914 to 1918, Britain employed about three thousand vessels against the U-boats and fought them with depth charges, mine nets, captive balloons, airships, hydroplanes, and U-boat traps. By the introduction of the convoy system in 1917, she banished the danger to such a degree that the revolution in Germany prevented the U-boat war from taking full effect. In the autumn of 1918 there were 436 German submarines under construction.

(This figure is the largest yet revealed in this connection and, coming as it does from an eminent authority, seems to us to be of sensational significance. If, by the end of the first World War, Germany, cut off from all sources of supply and lacking a clear naval policy, was working on 436 U-boats, one can imagine what must be going on on the wharves of all Europe today, when the leaders of Germany are fully awake to the paramount importance of submarine warfare.—The Editor.)

In the autumn of 1939, the English Prime Minister assured his nation that England possessed a means of defense against the newly arising U-boat menace that would certainly do away with this menace. What he meant was the system of convoys, which indeed was carried out with determination and skill and with the experiences of the Great War to go by. Yet it did not fulfill the expectations placed on it. In November 1940, Churchill had to admit in a radio speech that the growing U-boat menace was the most outstanding sign of the critical situation of the British Empire. And the U-boat menace was growing in spite of an excellently functioning system of convoys.

The danger did not diminish, for the feverish improvement and reinforcement of defensive measures were balanced by increasing U-boat attacks. In November 1940, the German High Command revealed for the first time that U-boats had successfully attacked a convoy not only singly but in packs.

Churchill's cries for help to Roosevelt became more urgent. When the sinkings figure decreased in the second half of 1941, London gave a sigh of relief. The reasons for this decrease could not be immediately ascertained. They were to be found in the restraint placed upon U-boats towards the ships of the United States, which country was officially still neutral. This restraint was imposed by the German Government for reasons of foreign policy. Another reason for the decrease in sinkings was to be attributed to the fact that it was necessary to send a considerable part of the U-boats to the Arctic Ocean in order to impede the delivery of war materials to the Soviet Union, as well as to the Mediterranean in order to interfere with British shipping between Gibraltar and Alexandria.

Success was not long in appearing in the Mediterranean. The large offensive started on November 18, 1941, against Rommel in Libya was founded on the conviction Churchill had expressed on November 12 that the British were the masters of the Mediterranean. However in November and December 1941, all British battleships in the Mediterranean were either sunk (*Barham*) or put out of commission for months (*Malaya*, *Valiant*, and *Queen Elizabeth*). Moreover, our airplanes rendered Malta temporarily as good as unserviceable as a flying base; and one aircraft carrier (*Ark Royal*), several cruisers and destroyers, as well as a dozen or so transports, were sunk. All this brought the British supplies to Egypt and Tobruk to a halt. At the same time, the supplies for our own troops in Africa could be sent from Italy to Tripolis without hindrance, and in this way enabled Rommel by the end of the year to undertake his victorious counterattack.

In the meantime, Roosevelt, through his provocative attitude toward the Emperor of Japan, brought down upon himself the declaration of war on the part of the Tripartite powers, the first anniversary of which historic event we are now celebrating. The Anglo-American battle fleet immediately suffered heavy defeats in Pearl Harbor and off Malaya, defeats which resulted in a complete reversal of the war situation in the Pacific. To this was soon added another equally great disaster when, on January 24, 1942, German submarines appeared suddenly in North American coastal waters and, more or less under the eyes of the Statue of Liberty, sank one ship after another, especially oil tankers, off New York as well as many other ports, without an effective protection against these attacks being devised during the first few months. Our U-boats had not been considered able to carry the war to America on their own. The Allies were surprised and unprepared when the U-boats carried their attacks into the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean, the South Atlantic, and even the Indian Ocean and also, in conjunction with airplanes, gained considerable successes in the Mediterranean and the Arctic Ocean.

Although the extension of the U-boats' field of operation places great demands on both ships and crews, it has increased their chances of success. For the tactics of the U-boat warfare consisted in keep-

ing under observation the weak spots in the enemy's maritime connections, which change according to the situation, and in attacking so suddenly that the enemy's measures of protection can only be taken *after* the U-boats have finished their job. As the battlefield extended, the distances between the various U-boat attacks grew proportionately, the enemy protection needed all the more time to appear at a new scene of attack, and the U-boats could continue their attacks that much longer before being driven off. Thus, for instance, U-boats and airplanes together succeeded in the period from July 2 to 7, 1942, in destroying every single ship of a convoy of 38 vessels headed for the Murmansk coast.

The only means of banning the danger seemed to be the rapid and increased construction of ships. The United States took the lead in this. Admiral Land, who demanded that ships be constructed solidly, was overshadowed by Admiral Vickery, who insisted upon the most rapid possible construction without regard to solidity. In spite of this, the lead of the U-boats has not yet been diminished, since the increase in the construction of ships was balanced by an increase in the number of our submarines ready for action. Our enemies agree with us that the U-boats are the most urgent threat to them. When, at the beginning of November 1942, they had to take upon themselves the risk of landing in North Africa, they were fully aware how difficult it would be to safeguard their supplies against U-boat attacks.

Meanwhile, on the anniversary of Japan's entry into the war, we proudly realize the fact of the close reciprocal effect of our simultaneous victories in the Atlantic and the Pacific. The naval losses in the Mediterranean towards the end of 1941 prevented the British from sending an adequate number of ships to ensure their position of naval power in the East and contributed toward their defeats off Malaya, in the Java Sea (February, 1942), and in the Coral Sea (May 1942). The shortage of shipping space caused by our attacks in the Atlantic prevented reinforcements arriving in time at Singapore, as was confirmed by Churchill himself in a speech before Parliament.

Churchill has also admitted to Parliament that our U-boat successes in the Atlantic have forced the United States to increase her protection there at the cost of her safety in the Pacific. And the repeated victories against convoys in the Arctic Ocean have tied up not only British but also American heavy forces in the North Atlantic. The repercussions from the Pacific were equally important. There the Japanese victories prevented the USA from concentrating her forces in the Atlantic. Moreover, the loss of raw-material sources in the Pacific has forced the USA to obtain substitutes from countries whose maritime connections are directly threatened by our U-boats, for example, tin from Bolivia and rubber from Brazil. The appearance of Japanese submarines in the Indian Ocean split up the naval protection of the British and the Americans even further and benefited the battle of tons in the Atlantic. The fighting around the Solomon Islands, which broke out in August 1942, has cost the US Navy many units of the indispensable classes of cruisers, aircraft carriers, and destroyers and has weakened its offensive and defensive power on all other theaters of war, on the African coast as much as anywhere else.

Thus the events on the various theaters are closely related to each other. And just as the war aims of Germany, Italy, and Japan run parallel in that they are all centered on freeing their "living space" from Anglo-American despotism, their naval warfare on the vast oceans is also one great joint undertaking. Just as the Japanese Fleet has lived up to its task in the Pacific, the German U-boats have fulfilled their task in the Atlantic.